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ABSTRACT

There have been many attempts recently to define the term "teacher education center." Perhaps the most popular definition embodies the following three assumptions: (a) that centers contribute to the improvement of schools as demanded by society; (b) that centers specifically increase the competence of individual teachers according to preestablished criteria; and (c) that centers meet the expressed needs of teachers and provide the environment which facilitates their improvement on their own terms. Teacher education centers in Florida involve teachers, school districts, and teacher education institutions. There are several functions involved in teacher education, and many different agencies have assumed major responsibility for carrying them out. An acute lack of coordinated, shared decision-making, however, inhibits the accomplishment of each function, as well as the process as a whole. These functions and processes are interdependent and require collaboration. This collaboration is not an attempt to make joint decisions concerning the governance of a school of education or the operation of a local school board. Each agency retains its internal autonomy but recognizes the external interrelation among involved agencies. (PB)

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TEACHER CENTERS IN FLORIDA
A FUNCTIONAL INTERDEPENDENCE IN TEACHER EDUCATION

by Jay P. Lutz

Introduction

The term "teacher education center" has recently gained wide use among educators but has not been so readily defined. Examples found in the literature take many forms and provide testimonial support, but offer few conceptual or functional descriptions. What is acceptable as a basis for a definition inevitably turns upon what is meant by a teacher center, how it will function and what its purpose is. During the 1960's and early 1970's many definitions of teacher centers have been proposed. Those offered by O'Gorman (1972) serve to illustrate this variety. He indicates that "teacher education centers" refers, in a broad sense, to any school or set of schools in which teacher education field experiences occur. Joyce and Weil (1973) prefer to think of centers as multi-dimensional constructs for which there is no single acceptable definition, but only a grouping of characteristics which reflect emphasis and preferences determined by local priorities and needs. Although these examples should not be considered a representative sample of teacher center definitions, they do indicate the diversity a truly representative sample would present.

Perhaps currently, the most popular concept of teacher education centers is that formulated by Joyce and Weil (1973) and by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (1971) and (1974). According to this view, a teacher center should embody three assumptions: (1) that centers contribute

to the improvement of schools as demanded by society; (2) that centers, by design, specifically increase the competence of individual teachers according to pre-established criteria; and, (3) that centers meet the expressed needs of teachers and provide the environment and conditions which allow them to improve themselves on their own terms.

Despite the wide variety of interpretations of the meaning of centers, there are areas of substantial agreement. First, there is general consensus that centers are predisposed to collaborative mechanisms, i.e., variations on a consortium structure where teachers participate with university faculty in making decisions for their training. The readiness to focus on shared decision-making is one of the qualities which is characteristic of teacher education centers.

A second area of substantial agreement is a major focus on clinical experience which uses strategies ranging from unstructured activity in an informal atmosphere, such as an open classroom, to sophisticated systems for analyzing teacher behavior and instruction, such as Flanders Interaction Analysis. Consequently, the emphasis on use of clinical environments for teacher training contributes greatly to the third area of agreement.

Thirdly, facilities for teacher education centers must be in close proximity to the "real world" setting. They should provide the on-going classroom conditions which permit the acquisition and demonstration of teaching competence by those working toward an educational career.

In Florida collaboration, shared decision-making, and a focus on clinical experiences have been found in varying degrees

an elements of both pre-service and in-service teacher training programs. The Teacher Education Council act of 1973 represents the State's official position on the teacher education center movement.

Teacher Education Centers--A Concept

Teacher education centers in Florida are organized arrangements involving teachers, school districts, and teacher education institutions for collaboration efforts in teacher education, both pre-service and in-service. It is expected that centers will those aspects of teacher education in which an effective program depends on mutual involvement of all those of those groups and which are more appropriately conducted in a school or field setting than on a campus setting.

Governor Reubin Askew, as required by the Teacher Education Center Act of 1973, appointed a State Council for Teacher Education Centers. The Commissioner of Education requested that the Council in cooperation with the Department of Education, make a study of teacher education centers and develop recommendations. These recommendations resulted in a number of principles by which local school districts and universities should address themselves as they develop teacher education centers. These principles may be summarized as follows:

1. Teacher Education Centers should not be established as an educational program separate from existing institutions.

2. Centers function more to facilitate and coordinate available resources than to perform the actual delivery of services.

3. Centers represent collaboration and cooperation in a shared decision-making process among involved agencies.

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